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Implicit Bias and Epistemic Oppression in Confronting Racism

ABSTRACT: *Motivating reforms to address discrimination and exclusion is important. But what epistemic practices characterize better or worse ways of doing this? Recently, the phenomena of implicit biases have played a large role in motivating reforms. We argue that this strategy risks perpetuating two kinds of epistemic oppression: the vindication dynamic and contributory injustice. We offer positive proposals for avoiding these forms of epistemic oppression when confronting racism.*

KEYWORDS: implicit bias, racism, epistemic oppression, testimony

Introduction

In taxonomizing the different forms that racism can take, Gloria Yamato (2004) identifies the category of unaware/unintentional racism and its role in systemic and institutionalized forms of racism: 'with the best of intentions, the best of educations, and the greatest generosity of heart, Whites, operating on the misinformation fed to them from day one, will behave in ways that are racist, will perpetuate racism by being "nice" the way we're taught to be nice' (2004: 100; the other categories Yamato introduces and analyses are: aware/blatant racism, aware/covert racism, and unaware/self-righteous racism). Many recent reform efforts argued for within academia (and beyond) have focused on this kind of racism. While acknowledging that attention to specific acts of discrimination is only part of tackling racism, which is systemic and structural, some have pushed for policies and procedures to be changed in order to combat unintentional racism. Moreover, attention to structural racism also requires attention to individual actions (because individual action partially constitutes social structures and because individual action is needed to implement changes to institutional practices (see Haslanger 2015; Madva 2016; Ayala and Vasilyeva 2015; and Ayala 2016). Relying on good will and antiracist intentions cannot be sufficient.

It is important, however, that changes to policies and procedures are driven by the right kinds of evidence. This raises the question of what type of evidence should be used to motivate reforms to tackle unintentional racism. Recent discussions of unintentional racism have given prominence to one type of evidence: studies from

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social psychology on implicit bias (see, e.g., Saul 2013, 2018, the American Philosophical Association Good Practices Guide: section 2: 15, section 5: 62). This research has motivated reforms in some institutions (albeit with varying degrees of commitment to rooting out deeply entrenched racism because the institutions promising reforms based on concerns about implicit bias range from individual philosophy departments, to whole universities, to Google, to healthcare providers, and to police forces). However, we argue there are risks associated with focusing too narrowly on this type of evidence at the expense of another source of evidence about unintentional racism: testimony from lived experience of racism.

We draw on insights from Black feminist epistemology to argue that to neglect this testimonial evidence risks perpetrating two types of injustice: (i) the *vindication dynamic*, in which testimony of lived experience of discrimination is treated as being in need of vindication; (ii) *contributory injustice*, which occurs when members of marginalized groups are denied the opportunity to contribute to the shared interpretative resources available in a community. Efforts to motivate antiracist reforms, therefore, should draw on and integrate both sources of evidence, as we later propose.

1. Sources of Evidence

This section introduces two sources of evidence about unintentional racism, each of which provides support for instigating changes to policies and procedures. There are, of course, various other evidentiary sources: statistical, historical, etc.; we set these aside for now.

1.1 Testimonial Resources, Literary and Social Psychological

One source of evidence is testimony from those with lived experience of unintentional racism. One recent source of testimonial evidence is Claudia Rankine's (2014) *Citizen: An American Lyric*, which provides a rich and bleak compendium of the everyday slights and insults experienced by Black Americans. Rankine presents testimonies, based on her own and others' experiences, articulated in the second-person 'you' form, in order to position the reader as 'an apparent part of the encounter.' (Rankine explains two other reasons for this form of address: first, that since the experiences were not all her own, she did not want to 'own' them with the first person pronoun, and second, that addressing the readers as 'you' forces them to make assumptions about race: 'you're race-ing these people in order to understand this dynamic. I wanted that positioning to happen for readers' [Rankine, quoted in Sharma 2014].) For example:

> You and your partner go to see the film *The House We Live In*. You ask a friend to pick up your child from school. On your way home your phone rings. Your neighbour tells you he is standing at his window watching a menacing black guy casing both your homes. The guy is walking back and forth talking to himself and seems disturbed. . . . Your partner calls your friend and asks him if there's a guy walking

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> back and forth in front of your home. Your friend says that if anyone were outside he would see him because he is standing outside. You hear sirens through the speakerphone. (Rankine 2014: 15)
>
> In line at the drugstore it's finally your turn, and then it's not as he walks in front of you and puts his things on the counter. The cashier says, Sir, she was next. When he turns to you he is truly surprised.
> Oh my God, I didn't see you.
> You must be in a hurry, you offer.
> No, no, no, I really didn't see you. (Rankine 2014: 77)
>
> When the waitress hands your friend the card she took from you, you laugh and ask what else her privilege gets her? (Rankine 2014: 148)

In these passages Rankine explores the way neighbors, strangers, and friends are implicated in—perpetrators of or party to—a daily grind of racist slights: assuming as other, as dangerous, intrusive, out of place.

The following features of Rankine's examples are especially important to the current analysis. First, these insults are presented as slips or unintentional or unthinking. This is not to say they are driven by implicit bias, but rather that perpetrators of them may not be driven by ill will (though this is not precluded). They would fit Yamato's (2004) category of 'unintentional racism'. Second, prominent alongside these descriptions is the grappling with ambivalence: 'what did he just say? Did she really just say that? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth?' (2014: 9). Third, the deniability of what happened hinders the ability to definitively label any one instance racism: couldn't the incident be rationalized some other way (an honest mistake)? Compare also the title of Yamato's piece: 'Something about the Subject Makes it Hard to Name'. Fourth, dealing with the ambivalence that results, in part from the deniability, is part of the burden that Rankine describes. But, fifth, the cumulative effect reveals—to the protagonist and to the reader—a pattern of treatment underwritten by a set of associations that others apply to her and that she carries with her: Black, dangerous, intrusive, other, trespassing in white space.

Testimonies can also be found in the literature on experiences of microaggressions. In a series of focus groups, Sue and colleagues (2008) gathered testimonies of people of colors' experiences of microaggressions and identified commonalities in participants' experiences. One of the prominent themes—one that resonates with Rankine's writings—is the deniability of the behavior and the possibility of rationalizing it away as something other than racism, in spite of how it was experienced. Sue et al. write of 'Another participant['s] . . . struggle' when a white woman changed seats on the train from sitting next to her:

> Maybe it just so happened that the person she decided to sit next to wasn't Black, and she wasn't Black. I can't say that's why she moved, but maybe she wanted to be close to the window. I don't know. (2008: 332)

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Notwithstanding the ambiguity, the understanding of how one might be perceived—dangerous, out of place, incompetent—is reported as ever present and shaping interactions:

> Inside an elevator, a closed space, being very conscious if there is a White woman, whether or not she's afraid, or just sort of noticing me, trying to relax myself around her so she's not afraid. (2008: 333)
>
> So when I walk into a hospital and say I'm here to fix your machine, I get a double take initially. . . . They ask me a lot of questions. . . . It's subtle, it's more like they want to find out what I know and who I am before they trust me with it. (2008: 333)

Others reported strategies for dealing with this, notably, identifying what has gone wrong with the interaction in terms of unintentional or unconscious white racism:

> I don't blame it on myself; it's not like, what's wrong with me? It's like, oh, that's that White unconsciousness that they're so well trained in. (2008: 332)

However, the participants emphasized the pervasiveness of the slights and the burden of interpreting or challenging every one of them: 'If you were to address every microaggression, it's like all "Oh there you go again, you people"' (2008: 333).

At issue here again is a failure to be able to communicate effectively due to the incompetence of one's audience, what Dotson has called 'testimonial smothering' (2011: 244). What one wants to express is that harmful discrimination has occurred, but the behavior is not recognized as such by the perpetrators.

These examples show how testimony from lived experience can provide evidence about unintentional racism. Note also that again, there is emphasis on the deniability of the discriminatory treatment; there is attention to the difficulty of identifying it as an instance of discrimination; and the difficulty of confronting the perpetrator who (it is anticipated) shares a different way of understanding the incident. As we can see, testimonial evidence—whether from literature, qualitative research in social psychology, or elsewhere—has the potential to be a powerful tool wherever evidence of unintentional racism can be used to motivate and shape institutional change.

1.2 Evidence from the Social Psychology Research Program on Implicit Bias

A second source of evidence about some instances of unintentional racism is psychological research on implicit bias. Many philosophers—and, indeed, many people outside the academy—are by now familiar with the notion of implicit bias. Implicit biases are the mental constructs that lead people automatically to associate members of social groups with certain characteristics (though there are competing ways of understanding what these mental constructs are, see, e.g.,

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Holroyd, Scaife, and Stafford 2017). These automatic thought processes may encode stereotypes or negative evaluations contrary to the thinker's professed values. For example, studies show that people who report egalitarian principles can harbor implicit biases that encode racist stereotypes and evaluations. Implicit biases are hypothesized to be at work in studies that reveal discriminatory behaviors. Implicit biases are recognized to be pervasive but difficult to detect and to control (see Jost et al. 2009 for an overview).

Psychological studies purport to measure such biases using indirect measures. These are experimental techniques that bypass participants' reflective self-reports of their beliefs or attitudes. For example, the Implicit Association Test (IAT) measures how quickly and accurately participants respond to stimuli representing a social group (e.g., white or Black) and stimuli representing concepts such as *loyal*, *honest* or *abuse*, *murder* (on an evaluative IAT), or *brainy*, *smart* vs. *athletic*, *rhythmic* on a stereotype IAT (Amodio and Devine 2006). The speed and accuracy of participants' responses are used to generate a score that reflects the difference in response times with respect to each social group (e.g., how much faster at categorizing white with positive notions or stereotypes than Black with positive notions or stereotypes). It is inferred that this indicates how strongly participants associate the respective social groups with the target concepts (the evaluations, positive or negative, or stereotypes). Typically, these studies indicate that participants hold biases against Black people.

Studies also look for the impact of implicit bias on discriminatory behaviors. For example, studies that focused on employment contexts found that participants made differential evaluations of the same CV and differential hiring recommendations based on interview materials depending on the race of the candidate (Dovidio and Gaertner 2000). In medical contexts, practitioners who participated in studies made differential treatment prescriptions to white or Black patients based on the same presentation of symptoms, and their tendency to do so correlated with the extent to which they showed implicit racial bias on indirect measures, that is, in the IAT (Green et al. 2007). In studies that looked at behaviors that may manifest in everyday interactions, white participants were found to sit further away from Black individuals, smile less, converse less, and manifest more errors of speech (McConnell and Leibold 2001). If such behaviors issue from implicit bias, then they may be instances of unintentional racism, perpetrated without ill will or explicit prejudice. Researchers on implicit bias are at pains to emphasize the pervasiveness of the phenomena; the majority of white participants and perhaps half of Black participants show patterns of anti-Black bias. And it is hypothesized that the occasions in which bias might be most likely to influence behavior are those in which one's behavior can be rationalized by some other, non-race-related considerations (Dovidio and Gaertner 2000).

Drawing on such findings has been a catalyst for change, for example:

1. Enabling individuals (who may be in a position to enact institutional change) to gain a greater awareness of the possibility that they are perpetrators (albeit unintentionally and despite goodwill) of discrimination;

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2. Opening up conversations about discrimination and inclusion, which may prove easier if they do not involve attributions of ill will or explicit prejudice (however, see Eddo-Lodge [2017: xii] on the problems with tailoring discussions of race to accommodate white people's discomfort);
3. Motivating institutional reforms that combat unintentional racism, such as: reform of reading lists, hiring procedures, workplace climate policies, and so on (see, e.g., Saul 2018; Holroyd and Saul 2018 for an overview of these reforms in academia).

Recent impetus to make institutional changes to combat unintentional racism has been generated in large part due to discussions drawing on the implicit bias research program. But despite these gains, there are problems with drawing on this evidence alone—it is these that we aim to highlight.

2. Selecting Evidence, the Vindication Dynamic, and Contributory Injustice

Since there are multiple sources of evidence to which one might appeal in one's attempts to instigate positive institutional change, what hangs on the choice about to which evidence to appeal? In this section, we argue that there are risks associated with the use of one kind of evidence—that from quantitative research on implicit bias—while not properly incorporating other evidence, that is, the testimony from lived experience of racism.

This is motivated first by the thought that due to the pervasiveness of discussions of the psychological research on implicit bias, many people are likely to find this evidence to be especially compelling and powerful, and consequently to focus on it to the detriment of other evidence. And, second, as we will spell out, there are particular costs and harms associated with focusing solely on the quantitative psychological findings that would not be incurred by focusing solely on testimonial evidence. Specifically, there is a risk of perpetrating what, drawing on Patricia Hill Collins's (2002) work, we call a *vindication dynamic,* and a kind of injustice that Kristie Dotson (2012) has identified as *contributory injustice*. Note that our claim is not that there is something intrinsic to the findings of quantitative social psychology that generates these risks. Rather, in our current social and academic climate, which is one in which scholars of color are marginalized or excluded and in which testimony of people of color is often silenced or unheard, these risks loom large.

2.1 The Vindication Dynamic

Our concern in this section is an epistemic dynamic that is described by Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* (2002). Collins provides the following example:

> Various descendants of Sally Hemings, a Black woman owned by Thomas Jefferson, claimed repeatedly that Jefferson fathered her

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> children. These accounts forwarded by Jefferson's African-American descendants were ignored in favour of accounts advanced by his White progeny. Heming's descendants were routinely disbelieved until their knowledge claims were validated by DNA testing. (2002: 270)

Testimony provided by Hemings and her descendants was denied credibility until scientific tests supported the claims found therein. Faced with conflicting testimonial evidence, racist norms of credibility ensured that testimony from white speakers was afforded credibility that the testimony of Hemings and her descendants was not. Yet Hemings's testimony was ultimately vindicated by DNA evidence (Gordon-Reed and Takagi 1997). While this vindication is important, there is something problematic in the idea that certain kinds of testimony—testimony from people of color, especially when it challenges existing power structures and hierarchies—stand in need of vindication. The assumption that Hemings's testimony alone cannot provide sufficient reason for belief, absent verification from other sources of evidence, is part of a long history of epistemic exclusion.

The vindication dynamic may be thought of as an instance of what Kristie Dotson and Marita Gilbert (2014) have recently labeled 'disappearances': as they put it, 'the lives and experiences of Black women are rendered invisible in public narratives' (Dotson and Gilbert 2014: 873), pointing to the work of Fannie Barrier Williams (1905), Zora Neale Hurston (1950), Audre Lorde (1990), and Rebecca Wanzo (2009). For example, Zora Neale Hurston (1950) described the one-dimensional stereotypes that obscure the intellectual and emotional lives of Black Americans. Rebecca Wanzo (2009), writing more than half a century later, argues that while narratives of Black women's lives are present in public discourse, those narratives often homogenize experiences and focus on personal, rather than social, transformation as a way of overcoming oppression, thus obscuring the reality and experience of systemic racism. Our focus in this section is on one epistemic dynamic that can render narrative and testimonial evidence of racism invisible, ensuring that it is often not present in contemporary discourses about discrimination (cf. Davidson 2019, who raises similar concerns about the use of implicit bias evidence in academic philosophy; Davidson focuses on how the use of the empirical evidence prevents widespread ['third-order'] change to epistemic systems).

Collins takes the treatment of Hemings to illustrate the ways in which 'power relations shape who is believed and why' (2002: 270). In this case, power dynamics of race and gender result in the testimony of a Black woman being treated as unreliable. The contributions made by her testimony are therefore marginalized and undermined as a source of knowledge, and moreover, the subsequent exclusion of such knowledge conveniently serves to sustain certain myths about race and racial purity (e.g., that whites were superior, that whites and Blacks should not and did not miscegenate, and that slave owners' sexual abuse of enslaved women was not one of the ways in which the latter were exploited), the conduct of whites in power (as morally impeccable, rather than as exploitative, morally corrupt, and as perpetrators of abuses with impunity), the

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place of Black people in America (as passively, indeed naturally, subservient). Collins explores the ways that such epistemic dynamics marginalize important understanding of experiences of oppression, and Black women are further harmed by their exclusion from the epistemic community and the barriers to getting the nature of their social experiences on the record.

This is just one form of what Dotson calls epistemic oppression: 'the epistemic exclusions afforded positions and communities that produce deficiencies in social knowledge', whereby an exclusion concerns infringements that reduce knowers' ability to participate in epistemic communities (2012: 24). Our suggestion here is that such a dynamic is risked in discussions of unintentional racism focusing solely on quantitative psychological research on implicit bias. To understand this point, let us probe the example of Hemings further. In this case there are multiple epistemic wrongs. In the first instance, there is the wrong of the initial epistemic exclusion of Hemings (and indeed, slave women in general). To the extent that Hemings's testimony is later vindicated by the emergence of DNA evidence, it is important to note that it is the *proposition* at issue that is vindicated. Her testimony is regarded as something that stood in need of post hoc vindication. Her status as a knower and her testimony alone was and remains insufficient to provide the evidential support for the proposition that Jefferson fathered her children (despite her being, one might think, uniquely placed to determine this and despite the consistency of her account with what is widely known about the sexual exploitation of enslaved women by white owners).

Note that while the later means of vindication might itself be epistemically respectable—endorsing the findings of well-conducted DNA studies is a rational response to the evidence—it nonetheless contributes to an oppressive epistemic dynamic. Even though the moment of vindication is not itself one in which we see an exclusion, it puts in stark relief the epistemic norms that cast some knowers as unreliable sources of knowledge. The vindication dynamic contrasts with cases in which some initial evidence, taken to have probative value, is later given further support by being confirmed or corroborated. In cases of the vindication dynamic, the initial testimony is not considered to have probative value, which is precisely why the later evidence is vindicatory. To the extent that this vindication dynamic entrenches norms that shape who is and is not reliable or which testimony does or does not stand in need of vindication, it contributes to patterns of epistemic oppression.

What is the relevance of this dynamic to our practical question of to what evidence we might appeal in supporting the proposition that discrimination can be unintentional? Focusing solely on quantitative evidence from the research program on implicit bias sidelines preexisting testimonial evidence about racism, foregrounding evidence emerging from academic studies, generated in laboratory conditions. It also marginalizes the work of people of color who have articulated these aspects of their experience, thereby marginalizing evidence based in lived experience. This has particularly consequential racial dynamics, insofar as, as Collins (2002) writes, such evidence has particular importance in Black women's epistemic communities. Conversely, evidence emanating from the predominantly white academy is privileged. Collins's diagnosis focuses in particular on

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hierarchies of knowledge (academic research vs. testimonial), which are themselves racialized. This explanatory framework is more plausible than an explanation that appeals just to the race of those producing the research because in this case much prominent research on implicit bias is conducted by scholars of color (e.g., J. Eberhardt, M. Banaji, C. Lai). As Collins argues, testimonial evidence is not valued in this hierarchy, but in particular the testimony of women of color is devalued.

While there is something very important about providing evidence for the proposition at issue—namely, that racism can be perpetrated unintentionally — there are risks involved with doing so by appeal only to the quantitative research program on implicit bias. While the *proposition* for which there is testimonial evidence—that there exists unintentional racism—is confirmed by appeal to evidence of implicit bias, the emphasis on that evidence risks entrenching certain oppressive epistemic dynamics. In particular, it risks entrenching the message that a certain kind of testimony—qualitative testimonial evidence based in experience, specifically the experiences of people of color—is insufficiently credible and stands in need of vindication. It risks entrenching the notion that *this,* rather than *that* evidence suffices to warrant belief. (One might think that evidence from research on implicit bias is helpful in that it increases the credibility of future testifiers about racism. This does not mitigate the problem for past and present and future testifiers, whose words apparently need vindication.)

Focusing only on the psychological research on implicit bias also risks conveying the message that the kind of evidence that is important is that which affirms the existence of (the possibility of) unintentional racism by focusing on the cognitions of the perpetrators. The 'mere' experience of those targeted by the discrimination, according to these norms, is insufficient to warrant belief. To prioritize psychological research on implicit bias is to suggest not only that testimony alone is insufficient, but that a certain kind of evidence is needed to vindicate these 'perceptions'—evidence concerning the cognitions of the perpetrators.

In drawing attention to the vindication dynamic, we do not need to establish that (as is plausibly the case with Hemings) the disregarding of testimonial evidence is in each instance a case of testimonial injustice in the sense that has become familiar through the work of Miranda Fricker (2007), namely, involving prejudicial judgments of deflated credibility due to one's social identity. We do not need to maintain that all, or even the majority, of cases in which people appeal solely to quantitative psychological findings on implicit bias when discussing unintentional racism are cases in which those people are displaying *prejudice* or making judgments of reduced credibility. Nor do we want to maintain this, because we lack the data about the cognitive states of those who have appealed to implicit bias evidence. What is important to the current discussion, however, is that focusing solely on psychological research on implicit bias serves to entrench certain hierarchical norms and to perpetuate epistemic exclusions that produce deficiencies in social knowledge (Dotson 2012: 24). Failing to heed someone's testimonial evidence is to proceed *as if* it lacks credibility even if such judgments have not been made. The dynamic that we describe thus instantiates a form of epistemic oppression.

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In selecting one's evidence, then, we must be alert to the risk that attention only to psychological research on implicit bias risks entrenching a set of epistemic norms whereby the status of testimony of lived experience of racism is devalued. Moreover, focusing solely on the psychological research on implicit bias risks entrenching oppressive norms about the kind of evidence that is reliable: the lived experience of people of color is devalued and stands in need of vindication from more 'respectable' sources of evidence.[1]

2.2 Contributory Injustice

We now consider a second risk faced by focusing on the research program on implicit bias rather than testimonial evidence: the risk of perpetrating a specific form of injustice identified by Kristie Dotson, i.e. contributory injustice.

Contributory injustice is defined as the circumstance where:

> an epistemic agent's willful hermeneutical ignorance in maintaining and utilizing structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources thwarts a knower's ability to contribute to shared epistemic resources within a given epistemic community by compromising her epistemic agency. (Dotson 2012: 32)

Hermeneutical resources are our resources for making sense of the world—concepts, theoretical frameworks, narratives, practical starting points or assumptions, and so forth. They are *structurally prejudiced* if the ability of people in different social locations to contribute to the shared hermeneutical resources is asymmetrical. For example, if white people are able to participate in the shaping of the resources available to make sense of the social world to a greater extent than Black people, those resources are structurally prejudiced. Such a pattern of participation will produce hermeneutical resources that are unduly influenced by those hermeneutically advantaged people who have contributed—usually, those in positions of power and influence—and insufficiently influenced by members of the marginalized groups themselves. This asymmetrical influence is likely to result in a set of resources that is a better 'fit' for the experiences of those in a hermeneutically advantaged position and a worse 'fit' for the experiences of those in hermeneutically disadvantaged positions in that it lacks the conceptual resources or interpretative meanings that are needed to capture the experiences of the latter group(s) adequately. Marginalized groups may have developed their own hermeneutical resources: 'alternative epistemologies, countermythologies, and hidden transcripts' (Dotson 2012: 31). These alternative sets of hermeneutical resources are available for marginalized individuals to understand their social experiences, but are not part of shared collective resources.

Contributory injustice occurs, then, when the resources that marginalized people use to interpret and articulate their experiences are not acknowledged or taken

[1] By focusing on how epistemic norms and practices produce epistemic wrongs our work here is consistent with recent arguments presented by Charles Mills (2007), Kristie Dotson (2012), Jose Medina (2013), Saray Ayala and Nadya Vasilyeva (2015), Ayala (2016), and Michael Doan (2018).

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seriously in an epistemic community and when the dominant hermeneutical resources used in that community thwart those individuals' ability to contribute to the shared resources (the alternative resources they do have available are not widely understood or regarded as useful conceptualizations). An example of contributory injustice is provided by Reni Eddo-Lodge, who describes how the concept of 'intersectionality'—developed by Black feminist scholars to articulate how gender and racial oppressions intersect to disadvantage Black women—has been refused uptake by writers in the mainstream media in the United Kingdom, ostensibly for being 'utter jargon' (2017: 140).

On Dotson's account of contributory injustice, these structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources are utilized by an agent or agents due to their *willful ignorance*. Willful ignorance, for Dotson, 'maps onto [an] epistemically culpable failure' (2012: 33); thus, at stake here are cases of ignorance where one should have known better. On Dotson's account, it is easy to fall short of the relevant epistemic standards. Her claim is that contributory injustice is very easy to commit and very difficult to avoid (2012: 38–40). Dotson argues that people can perpetrate contributory injustice without being aware of doing so, without thinking that they are putting a foot wrong. Accordingly, the degree to which the failure is epistemically culpable could vary considerably. Because contributory injustice is difficult to avoid, one might think that the degree of culpability may, in some instances, be minimal.

With this exposition of contributory injustice in place, we now consider how one's selection of evidence—in particular, a selection that focuses solely on research on implicit bias—could perpetrate contributory injustice. Earlier, we presented what can be thought of as two sets of hermeneutical resources that can be used to frame one's understanding of unintentional racism and exclusion. One set of hermeneutical resources is grounded in the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced and witnessed discrimination. The other set of hermeneutical resources has been developed in social psychology and is concerned with the notion of implicit bias and its role in unintentional racism. Of course, these two sets of resources need not be exclusive; they may be partially overlapping, as we saw above, when some participants in Sue et al.'s (2008) studies refer to the notion of unconscious bias to explain their experiences.

Here, we want to argue that in selecting one's evidence and choosing to focus solely on the resources from the quantitative research program on implicit bias, one may perpetrate contributory injustice. To show this, we need to show that such resources are structurally prejudicial, that use of them thwarts other knowers from contributing to the epistemic community, and that the use of them can be understood as an instance of willful ignorance.

Recall that hermeneutical resources are structurally prejudiced if the ability to contribute to those resources of people in different social locations is asymmetrical, with the likely outcome that those resources differentially reflect the social experiences of the contributing groups. To the extent that the collective resources utilized in discussions of implicit bias are technical tools developed within academia (psychology, philosophy), the exclusion of Black and minority ethnicity individuals from academia is one way in which differently racialized

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groups are asymmetrically positioned to contribute to those resources. In the United States, the National Centre for Education Statistics (2020) found that in 2018, 75 percent of full-time faculty were white, and among professors, 80 percent were white, with Black men and women comprising 4 percent of all professors. In the United Kingdom, a recent study indicates that 'black academics constitute 1.54% of the total UK academic population a significant underrepresentation in terms of the broader resident black population being 3.3%' (Shilliam 2015: 32). At professorial level fewer than 1 percent are Black, 25 (raw figure) of whom are women (Rollock 2019). Insofar as psychology is not an outlier in terms of representation, the context in which the research on implicit bias is being done is one where the ability of Black and minority ethnicity individuals to contribute to those resources is asymmetric, simply insofar as these individuals are drastically underrepresented. This will be exacerbated in conditions, such as those reported on by Bhopal and Jackson (2013), in which Black and minority ethnicity academics feel excluded, stereotyped, and overscrutinized. And, as Romdenh-Romluc argues, hermeneutical marginalization can remain even when individuals have access to hermeneutical power and are in positions to shape meanings—even then, their hermeneutical marginalization is likely to show up in the social meanings available for use (2016: 596).

Alongside the asymmetries in *who* contributes to the shared resources, we see differences in what kinds of evidence are afforded significance. To the extent that testimonies grounded in lived experience of racism are devalued, individuals offering such understanding for incorporation into the collective hermeneutical resources are thwarted in their attempts to do so. The case to be made here draws in part on the claims set out in our discussion of the vindication dynamic above. There, we drew upon Patricia Hill Collins's claims that Black women's knowledge has been marginalized, and in particular knowledge that is developed through and communicated in testimonies grounded in lived experiences of oppression is devalued. Already marginalized, these testimonies would be further disregarded if we were to focus solely on evidence pertaining to implicit bias.

To a certain extent, this is a contingent matter: given limited air time or journal space, if that is given to quantitative psychological research on implicit bias rather than research that attends to lived experiences of racism, the latter are marginalized. However, this pattern is one that is entrenched in a set of epistemic dynamics that devalues the perspectives and experiences of people of color, in particular women of color. Indeed, Dotson draws on Audre Lorde (1990) to tease out different mechanisms through which Black women's experiences ('words, work and lives') have been excluded: scrambling or distorting their words (e.g., by dissembling that one simply cannot understand what is being said), erasure, and disregard (2012: 33). On the one hand, as mentioned above, psychological research on implicit bias may in some sense serve to counteract the tendencies to scramble or erase experiences of racism—indeed, to focus on implicit bias is to point to evidence of its pervasiveness and to affirm experiences of unintentional racism. However, to draw *only* on such evidence is nonetheless to disregard the contributions to addressing racism that have been made by those who have experienced and witnessed it and to focus instead on the experimentally revealed

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dispositions of the perpetrators. This is to perpetuate a certain form of exclusion—both of certain knowers and of a certain kind of knowledge—namely, that grounded in experiences of the oppressive structure of the social world and presented in the hermeneutical resources that capture those experiences.

So, the hermeneutical resources are structurally prejudiced in terms of who contributes to them, and this corresponds to the kinds of knowledge and understandings that are given prominence and marginalized, respectively, in those shared resources. In particular, testimony offers up a different aspect of the phenomena at issue: what it is like to experience persistent, everyday racism. The resources needed to describe this aspect of the social world will, of course, be different from those required to describe the cognitive mechanisms that might underpin such patterns of discrimination. Our resources will be structurally prejudiced if the interpretative resources we have available to understand unintentional racism become dominated by or excessively focused on the cognitions of the perpetrators. As such, the shared or dominant resources may be asymmetrical in having rich resources to capture the phenomenon of *perpetrating* unintentional racism, but fewer resources—or a gap in the resources—to understand what it is like to experience such discrimination. This is to the disadvantage of anyone trying to register in the shared collective resources such experiences and the concepts needed to make good sense of them.

This exclusion thwarts the abilities of knowers to contribute further to the shared hermeneutical resources. One way these contributions are thwarted is simply the lack of uptake they receive. One cannot contribute to the shared hermeneutical resources if audiences do not hear or attend to the testimonies available. A second way in which such contributions are thwarted is a matter of emphasis; to the extent that evidence about experiences of discrimination is available, if it is not regarded as important or useful, it will be not be fully incorporated into the shared conceptual resources. The conceptual space for such meanings and understandings is there, but relegated to an unimportant or peripheral aspect of the phenomenon that does not significantly advance collective understanding. A third way in which contributions may be thwarted is if the failure to get any uptake or to be regarded as contributing valuable concepts for understanding the phenomenon results in downstream 'testimonial smothering' (Dotson 2011: 244). Testimonial smothering occurs when knowers fail to speak in a particular context, having learned that they will not be heard. While the harms of hermeneutical injustice and contributory injustice have already been articulated (see, e.g., Fricker 2007; Dotson 2011), it is important in this context to emphasize that the collective resources of an epistemic community are weakened overall if the evidence from testimony about lived experiences of racism is not included—there are epistemic costs all round in addition to the harm that accrues to individuals who are unable to contribute. We elaborate on this in the following section.

Finally, we contend that the use of these structurally prejudiced resources is (often) due to willful ignorance. Recall that on Dotson's view, it is very easy to commit contributory injustice and very difficult to avoid it. Overlooking evidence that one really should be aware of can suffice to make this a case of willful ignorance. An overemphasis on the quantitative psychological literature on

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implicit bias when one is aware of other sources of evidence would constitute willful ignorance on this construal.

Reflection on discourse about implicit bias, however, brings to light that there may be other ways of perpetrating contributory injustice that are not grounded in willful ignorance. For example, as mentioned above, there have been some gains from the attention to quantitative evidence of implicit bias, and one might make a strategic choice to focus on this evidence rather than on testimony because, for example, one thinks there will be greater uptake among one's peers of the psychological research program on implicit bias. There can be benefits to appearing to conform to oppressive epistemic norms of this type—norms such as 'assign comparatively higher value to (quantitative) evidence generated by (white) academic experts'—under specific, localized circumstances. For example, Michael Doan (2018) describes how activists and residents fighting for access to clean affordable water in Michigan (USA) benefited from conforming to epistemic norms giving preference to expert testimony from academic researchers. They (appeared to) conform to these norms by getting such experts engaged in their cause while also pushing back against the comparative value judgment expressed in the norm by highlighting the contribution that could be made by the stories of residents (cf. Medina 2013).

We do not wish to underplay the benefits of this type of strategic conformity to problematic norms, but we do wish to highlight the associated risks. While not setting aside testimony due to willful ignorance, this kind of strategic choice may still use and maintain structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources that thwart others' abilities to contribute to the shared epistemic resources in the ways we described above—especially if it does not at the same time challenge the oppressive epistemic norms. That is, such a strategic choice in this context may still place focus on quantitative research about the cognitions of discriminators at the cost of attention to testimony of those who have experienced discrimination. (Our claim is not that these strategic choices could never be justified but that they come with certain risks, consideration of which is needed in a full assessment of the strategic choice.) Thus, we propose an expansion of the notion of contributory injustice, to extend not only to exclusions that result from willful ignorance but also to exclusions based in strategic choices. However, if one is concerned to preserve the notion of contributory injustice only for those cases grounded in willful ignorance, then it suffices for our purposes to claim that something very much like it—the use of structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources that thwarts knowers' abilities to contribute to shared epistemic resources, thus compromising their epistemic agency—can result from strategic choices as well as from willful ignorance.

3. Inclusion, Epistemic and Practical Gains

We are *not* arguing here that there is no place for discussion of the quantitative psychological research on implicit bias in discourse surrounding unintentional racism and institutional change. Rather, we are arguing for a proper integration of both kinds of evidence into the shared hermeneutical resources. Dotson

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argues that 'addressing contributory injustice is difficult but not impossible. It requires . . . perceivers to be aware of a range of differing sets of hermeneutical resources in order to be capable of shifting resources appropriately' (2012: 34). Dotson emphasizes that this is by no means easy—that resources from marginalized groups might be difficult to access, difficult to navigate for those unfamiliar with the hermeneutical resources, and that considerable trust must be extended and developed by all sides in order to facilitate 'transconceptual communication' (Dotson 2012: 35). However, in this section we provide some tentative suggestions for how this integration might proceed.

The move toward better integration of testimonial evidence of racism into discussions of unintentional racism will require challenging the oppressive epistemic norms identified in this paper, and which underpin the vindication dynamic and contributory injustice. This requires challenging norms that give greater evidential weight to quantitative data over qualitative testimonial reports—in particular, the testimonial reports from members of hermeneutically marginalized groups—or norms that give greater weight to evidence about the cognitions of perpetrators over evidence about experiences of discrimination. We do not want to understate the extent to which there are likely to be difficulties here. For example, one will need to avoid the problems of epistemic exploitation (Berenstain 2016; Davis 2016) and epistemic appropriation (Davis 2018). One will also need to be attentive to matters of *whose* testimony is included; to avoid false assumptions about how representative those experiences are, and that focusing on issues of 'distribution of attention and conversational power' do not obscure the importance of addressing systems of social power that marginalize (Táíwò 2020).

We propose the following norms, as tentative starting points for the integrative project: first, to address the hierarchies of evidence that Collins articulates, we propose a norm of epistemic peership. Such a norm would reject the kinds of epistemic hierarchies we have encountered. As sources of evidence, quantitative and qualitative evidence have *pro tanto* equal probative value; academic scholarship about and lived experience of oppression each contribute distinctive evidential value. This is not to say that (for example) all testimony is as evidentially valuable as all academic scholarship; we well know that any instance of testimony can be unreliable, and any instance of putative scholarship can be junk. Rather, it is to say that there are multiple sources of evidence (not limited to those articulated above though our norms at present range primarily over them), and their type per se does not determine their epistemic value. Second, to address the problem of selective devaluation of some testimonies in particular and as a corrective to the extant dynamics we have pointed to in section 2, we adopt a norm of epistemic deference to the lived experience of marginalized groups. As Laurence Thomas puts it this is: 'the idea that there should be a presumption in favour of the [oppressed] person's account of [their] experiences' (1992: 374). Enacting this norm requires attentiveness to the dangers that 'deference epistemology', as Táíwò (2020) calls it, can present: it requires attention to the relative privileges and oppressions of marginalized group members, such that one does not attend to and take as representative the testimony of relatively privileged

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members of a marginalized group. It also requires ensuring that any such norm does not 'provide cover for social abdication of responsibility', that it does not reduce people to their experiences of trauma, and that focusing on attentional distribution does not distract from—but advances—attention to systemic social and material change (Táíwò 2020). Finally, we propose a norm of reciprocal feedback. Part of recognizing the values of the various sources of evidence is recognizing the way each can shape and advance the other. Qualitative testimonial evidence should shape and direct what quantitative data might be important to gather; conversely, quantitative data may encourage new interpretations of personal experience. Neither academic scholarship in general nor quantitative empirical research in particular should be detached from lived experience (cf. Anderson 2007: 608–10). This is not an exhaustive list, but a start at the integrative project.

Earlier, we noted that the collective resources are weakened when testimonial evidence of racism is marginalized or excluded. What are the epistemic gains to be secured in avoiding the epistemic oppression we have described? The first gain is simply that of having more evidence about unintentional racism. One illustration of how this additional evidence can be useful is in being able to respond to skepticism that has emerged. Recently, many critiques of the research program on implicit bias have emerged (Oswald et al. 2013; Singal 2017). And some take these concerns to undermine the motivation for institutional change.

Integrating testimonial evidence into our body of evidence about unintentional racism is important in helping us remain clear on the focus of this skepticism: what should *not* be cast in doubt is whether unintentional racism exists, whether individuals should be worried about their role in perpetrating it, and whether institutional change is needed in order to address problems of discrimination and exclusion. All this is affirmed by integrating testimonial evidence into our collective epistemic resources. Moreover, and crucially, the motivation for institutional change is not dependent on the robustness of the experimental findings—testimonial evidence provides us with reason to pursue changes to our policies and procedures that combat the forms of racism and exclusion described above. Of course, skeptics about the implicit bias research program may also be skeptical about testimonial evidence of discrimination. But as the evidence builds from multiple different sources, the skeptics face an additional burden of providing an alternative explanation for why so much evidence points toward what they seek to deny.

The second gain is that precisely because it draws on the experiences of discrimination, testimonial evidence provides more evidence about the *impact* of unintentional racism. For example, one of the concerns arising from the testimonial evidence concerns the problem of deniability. Recall that unintentional racism may be likely to have a role where individuals (perpetrators) can rationalize their decisions and explain away a choice or action in terms that do not make reference to race. Testimonial evidence shows us how this can inflect the experience of discrimination: the problem of deniability gives rise to doubts about what has really occurred—was it racism or a misstep or perhaps I misheard. . .? Testimonies that elaborate on the problems of discriminators being able to

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rationalize away biased behavior enrich the dominant hermeneutical resources by articulating the distinctive harm here: the cognitive and affective burdens of retaining confidence in one's interpretation of one's social interactions.

A third, practical gain concerns how these hermeneutical resources enrich collective understandings of how to address problems of unintentional racism. One of the great frustrations with the quantitative research program on implicit bias is its failure to deliver robust and long-lasting interventions that change individual bias or deliver changes in behavior. Integrating testimonial evidence helps us to identify resources to draw on in taking steps to combat unintentional racism. Plenty of recommendations can already be gleaned from the testimonial evidence. For example, this evidence helps us to identify the importance of removing burdensome contestations insofar as possible. Thinking about institutional policies or procedures from the point of view of addressing the problem of the contestability or deniability of what one has experienced as well as from the perspective of reducing the incidence of bias helps us see where efforts are most likely useful. Simply deploying strategies that aim to reduce bias (see Devine et al. 2012) will do nothing to ensure or provide assurance that bias is not at work. It may even make it more difficult to challenge bias because perpetrators can insist they have undertaken debiasing strategies. In contrast, interventions that focus not on reducing individuals' biases, but on changes to policy or procedures could do more to acknowledge the facts of systemic racism, provide mechanisms to challenge and address it, and set goals for reshaping the institution. This might involve instating certain procedures or antiracist policies, though that is not without potential pitfalls: a concern that came up in examining the experiences of Black and minority ethnicity academics was that procedures sometimes served as a smoke screen for continued discrimination (Pilkington 2013: 230).

We have proposed some norms for integrating qualitative testimonial evidence about lived experience with findings from the psychological research project on implicit bias. Our argument also highlights new questions to be addressed in future research. For example, how should we evaluate conflicting evidence about discrimination? Evidence from testimony may conflict with other testimony from people who are oppressed along the same or different axes or with evidence from other sources, such as evidence from the research program in psychology or statistical evidence about patterns of advantage or disadvantage (some of the difficulties of addressing these issues are articulated and evaluated by Kristie Dotson [2018]). Our work in this paper highlights the importance and value of finding ways to adjudicate these conflicts.

4. Conclusion

In practical efforts to address the role of unintentional racism in sustaining racial injustices and exclusions, there are choices to be made in selecting evidence to support antiracist efforts. While evidence from research programs on implicit bias may secure important gains, focusing on this evidence alone without also incorporating testimonial evidence risks perpetuating the vindication dynamic and perpetrating contributory injustice. Moreover, including this testimonial evidence

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can secure important epistemic gains, both motivating institutional change and enriching the resources available for understanding how to do this better.

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